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THE NECESSITY

Of ſome of the

Poſitive Inſtitutions

OF

CH-------TY

CONSIDER'D.

In a LETTER to the Miniſter of *Moffat*.

LONDON,

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BRITISH
MUSEUM

The Neceſſity of ſome of the poſitive Inſtitutions of Ch----y, conſidered.

Reverend Sir,

THE Diſcretion, Candor and Ingenuity, which ſhine through the whole of that Sermon, and Preface, containing ſome Remarks on *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation*, which you have lately publiſhed, induce me to take notice of your Performance, before any other, which has yet appeared on that Subject: And the rather, becauſe the Method, in which you proceed in pleading for the poſitive Inſtitutions of Chr----y, is by far more rational, and certain, than that which is commonly uſed by other Writers. I will not ſay that you give up ſeveral Things, which are ſtrenuouſly inſiſted on by your Brethren: But there is Ground, I think, to preſume that theſe Particulars, of which you have made Choice, are looked upon as of the laſt Importance, and the moſt con-

vincing. I ſhall therefore heartily joyn with you in laying the whole Streſs of the Controverſy upon ſuch Points, as you inſtance, and contend for in your Preface and Sermon.

To begin with what you advance in Vindication of the ſacred Writings, as they are charged with Obſcurity: I cannot well gueſs what you mean by *Obſcurity*; becauſe the moſt Part of what is ſuggeſted on that Head, implies a Charge of a very different Meaning. And if we conſider it, even in that Senſe, which you ſeem to give it, your Reaſoning on that Subject is not, in my Apprehenſion, ſufficiently exact.

A Book, you ſay, may be obſcurely writ, in reſpect of many particular Paſſages contained in it; and yet ſuch Things, as are of chief Importance, and for the Sake of which, the Book is rendred highly valuable, may be very clearly delivered. I readily own that this Obſervation is juſt, and affords a ſufficient Vindication of any Performance that is purely human. But the Caſe is widely different, when we are judging of what is of divine Inſpiration: And eſpecially when the ſuppoſed Perſpicuity of a Book (that is to ſay, ſuch a perfect, and extraordinary Meaſure of it, as is manifeſtly above the Reach of human Power to equal) is appealed to, as a Character of its divine Original.

It is commonly alledged, and, I think, with good Reaſon, that a Piece, which is divinely inſpired, may be expected to diſtinguiſh itſelf by its great Evidence and Perſpicuity, and the excellent manner of its Compoſure. How far a juſt Application of this

this Rule will contribute to the Credit of the ſacred Writings, I leave to the Judgment of the unprejudiced. Such will be careful honeſtly to anſwer to themſelves this Queſtion; Whether a Man of a tolerable Genius and Learning might not have delivered the Things contained in theſe Writings to as good, if not to far better Purpoſe? And whether there are not to be met with in the Holy Books Inſtances of ſuch Defects, in their manner of Compoſure, as muſt needs be aſcribed to ſome other Cauſe, than Alluſions to antient Cuſtoms, Genius of a Language, or any other Thing that could be peculiar to the Age and Country in which the Scriptures were writ?

THINGS might be ſaid againſt theſe Writings, which, perhaps, would hardly admit of the favourable Appellation of *Obſcurity*; and theſe ought to have a joynt Influence in determining their juſt Credit: For my Part, when I impartially compare them with ſeveral human Compoſitions, I can hardly conceive it poſſible, in a Way of mere human Reaſon, to believe that they are inſpired of God; or that they are indued with ſuch Excellency and Majeſty, as ſerves for a peculiar and diſtinguiſhing Character of their Divinity.

THE next Thing, I ſhall conſider, is the Advantage or Diſadvantage, which has accrued to Mankind from the Ch---n Religion. I am led to this by a Remark of your's upon an Inſinuation, which, you apprehend, is made to the Prejudice of it; as if it had produced but little Good in the World. To this Remark you anſwer, *firſt*, By denying the Fact; at leaſt by aſſerting, that it is a

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Thing of ſuch a Nature, as cannot be proved: Becauſe, as you alledge, *The Proof of it depends upon ſuch an Enumeration of Particulars, as no Man is capable to go through with.*

Pref. 25.

If there is any Thing in this Remark, to me it ſeems to have a Tendency to deſtroy all moral Evidence. We can judge of Things in Groſs; and ſay, That one Nation is happy, and another is not ſo; in one Learning and Politeneſs prevails, and another is remarkable for Barbarity, Ignorance, and Bigotry. If all ſuch Concluſions are ill founded, merely becauſe they are incapable of being eſtabliſhed by a Mathematical Exactneſs; *By a ſpecial Compariſon of ancient and modern Times; of Chriſtian with Pagan, and Mahometan Countries; and of particular Chriſtians with thoſe of another Religion: And ſo, as to take in likewiſe the inward Temper of Chriſtians, Pagans and Mahometans, as well as their outward Converſation,* that probable Evidence, which otherways you ſo juſtly extol, as of manifold Uſe to us in the moſt important Concerns of Life, could be of no Advantage to Mankind. We muſt either judge of Things, as they appear to us, and as we are able to judge of them; or we muſt not judge at all: And in this Way of proceeding, by taking Things in Groſs; without pretending to have computed what is particular in every Man, both as to his inward Temper, and outward Practice; I aſſert, that the Zeal of Ch---ns has produced more fatal Effects, than any other religious Belief, yea, than any other Cauſe whatſoever, as far as we know any Thing of the Hiſtory of the World; and that the Face of Things has

Pref. 25.

has been viſibly altered, to the worſe, in all theſe Countries, where this Religion obtained, from the Time that it prevail'd in them.

BUT this, you ſay, *cannot be juſtly aſcribed to any Thing in the* Genius *of the Ch---n Religion; and that if theſe bad Effects have only happen'd by an Abuſe of it; this proves no more, but that the beſt Things in the World may be perverted, and abuſed.*

I do not think it hard to divine, what it is in the Ch---n Religion, that has occaſioned all that Miſery, with which Mankind has been oppreſſed, ſince it ſpread over this Part of the World. The great Streſs which it lays upon mere Belief, and Orthodoxy, will appear to be pretty ſingular in its Conſtitution: From this Source have flow'd all that bitter and implacable Hatred, Perſecution, and Blood-ſhed, with which the differing Parties of Ch---ns, inflamed with mad Zeal, for their ſeveral Opinions, have raged againſt each other. This will appear more plain, if we compare the preſent Eſtabliſhment with the ancient Religions, in which, as there were no *credenda* enjoyn'd by Authority, there was no Ground of Striſe and Diſcord. But whatever may be in this Conjecture; I cannot but think it good Reaſoning to ſay, That a Religion was never deſigned by God, to produce great and extraordinary Benefits to Mankind, which did never produce ſuch Effects, but the quite contrary.

WHAT you ſay, *Of the Abuſe of the beſt Things in the World*, would be an excellent Vindication of ſuch Meaſures, as are taken by Beings of limited Capacities. The beſt contrived Deſigns of ſuch Beings,

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as we are, may indeed be perverted through the unexpected Malice, and Vice of others, ſo as to produce much greater Evils, than any Good could have been, which we intended by them. And the Reaſon why, in ſuch a Caſe, we are excuſed, is, becauſe we could not foreſee the whole Chain, and *Series* of Cauſes, and their Effects. But it is eaſie to ſee, That ſuch an Excuſe cannot decently be pled in behalf of a Being, who is ſuppoſed Omniſcient. And for this Reaſon, it is impoſſible for me to conceive, how a Religion could be intended by Almighty God, *to be vaſtly beneficial to Mankind, by improving their Minds, or reforming their Natures*; and that notwithſtanding he ſhould be fruſtrated of his good Purpoſe.

I come now to examine what you have advanced upon the Subject of *poſitive Inſtitutions.*

I agree with you, *That there may poſſibly be a Foundation for* poſitive Inſtitutions *in the Nature of Things; and that there may be Need for Rules, the Reaſon of which we are wholly ignorant of: And therefore, that, in conforming our ſelves to ſuch Rules, we muſt be influenced by mere Teſtimony; as either not being capable to ſee into the remote Relations of Things, or not having the ſame Means, as other Perſons, of knowing theſe Relations, becauſe of the different Circumſtances, in which we are placed.* This may be ſaid to take Place in every Particular, where a Man gives Credit to the Teſtimony of others; and therefore is a Maxim, that muſt influence us in almoſt every Inſtance of our Conduct, where we have Occaſion to put any of the general Rules of Religion and Morality in Practice.

If I go to viſit a ſick Perſon, I muſt be ſuppoſed to give Credit to the Teſtimony of others, that my Neighbour is ſick, and that he is to be met with at ſuch a Place: But all this differs widely from the preſent Diſpute: What I want to learn, is, how a Regard to ſuch Teſtimony, or the Uſe of *poſitive Inſtitutions* can poſſibly take Place with reſpect to ſuch general Rules, by which the rational Mind is to attain a Senſe of Religion and Virtue; or to become better diſpoſed for the Practice of them. To me indeed the Caſe appears impoſſible, and contradictory, for this Reaſon, which I ſubmit to your Conſideration.

Before any Thing can have ſuch an Influence, as to render a Man better, in a moral or religious Senſe, it ſeems manifeſtly imply'd, that the Perſon ſees the Fitneſs of this Mean, which he is to uſe: And to ſuppoſe, that a Perſon ſhould uſe any Means for this End upon implicite Grounds, and without perceiving any Fitneſs in them to produce it, muſt, by direct Conſequence, render them incapable of producing the End deſigned.

Are not Virtue and Religion rational Improvements, ſuch as depend upon Conſciouſneſs and Reflection, and imply a deliberate Purpoſe and Deſign? That this is comprehended in the Notion of Religion and Virtue, I believe, will not be denied: Nor is it leſs evident, that no Action can conduce to our Improvement in Religion and Virtue, but in ſo far as we perceive the Way and Manner, in which this Action is ſuppoſed to produce its proper Effect. If, for Inſtance, the eating a certain Fruit, or abſtain-

ing from it; the doing of this at a certain Time, *&c.* are, in my Apprehenſion, Actions which have not the leaſt Relation to my being rendred a better or worſe Man; on that very Account ſuch Actions cannot poſſibly render me better or worſe. If one ſhall deny this, he ought, in Conſiſtency with himſelf, to maintain that Religion and Virtue are not rational Improvements, or ſuch as require the Uſe of Thought and Reflection; but that it is poſſible for a Man to grow in the Love of God, and of his Neighbour in a Way of *hocus-pocus*, he knows not how; and by the Uſe of Means, which he cannot conceive how they ſhould be Means, or have the leaſt Tendency in them to accompliſh the End.

But whatever Myſteries of this Kind have been invented, or pretended, Reaſon ſeems clearly to decide, That *the Kingdom of God is not Meats and Drinks*; and that it is not Obſervance of Days, Diſtinction of Meats, or the like, that can recommend a Man to God; That, *whether he uſe ſuch Things, he is not the better, or whether he uſe them not, he is not the worſe.* Nothing, in ſhort, can in the leaſt contribute to our moral or religious Improvement, which has not, in our Apprehenſion, a manifeſt moral Goodneſs.

I own indeed, that it is, in ſome Reſpect, poſſible for the ſupream Being to annex to ſuch a Circumſtance, as one's dipping his Finger in Water at three of the Clock in the Afternoon on *Thurſday*, this miraculous Effect, that the Man ſhould afterwards find himſelf much improved in Grace and Virtue. I ſhall likewiſe grant, that ſuch an Influence may be owing to ſome unknown Properties in the

the Nature of Things, whereby the Man's Reflection was ſo excited, upon his uſing ſuch Means, as the dipping his Finger, &c. (Beſides, Inſtances might be given of Means being appointed by the Chriſtian Religion, and enjoin'd in order to religious Improvement, where, not only, no Connection can be diſcover'd betwixt the Means and the End propoſed, but where no Reflection can be ſuppoſed to follow) But all this is only a mere Poſſibility, from which no Argument can be drawn in your Favour: For if one ſhould preach up to me, that ſuch ſurprizing and extraordinary Virtues followed from the Uſe of ſuch Means; I would firſt require him to make full Proof of the Efficacy of this his Quack-like Receipt, and to ſhew me the Succeſs of it atteſted by unqueſtionable Documents. And beſides, I would have the worſe Opinion of the Affairs of the World, if I could perceive that ſo great Bleſſings and Benefits, as a virtuous Mind, and truly religious Diſpoſition, more valuable than all the Goods of Fortune, were diſpoſed of in ſuch a random Way. But if ſuch Effects were natural, and owing to the Influence of unknown Cauſes in Nature; I would not complain of the Nature of Things; (for that were to no Purpoſe, as being unalterable) but I ſhould think it hard, that Mankind were left Ignorant for the moſt Part of that which is ſo requiſite for them to know; not only in order to their farther Improvement, but, as is ſuppoſed, to their avoiding an endleſs Miſery, which was otherwiſe unavoidable. Nor could I believe that, in this Caſe, God's Ways were equal.

But there is not the leaſt Ground here to fall foul upon the divine Management. As God is infinitely Powerful, ſo he is infinitely Wiſe and Good. Whatever

ever Effects me may ſuppoſe produceable by Almighty Power, ſeparately conſidered; we may be abſolutely ſure, that infinite Wiſdom will, in all Caſes, treat us as rational Creatures; not wantonly diverting himſelf with our Faculties, by impoſing upon us at Pleaſure his expreſs Commands, for no wiſe End diſcovered to us, or diſcoverable by us. Religion and Virtue, (as was ſaid before) are rational Improvements; the Means leading to theſe muſt likewiſe be rational, I mean, ſuch as are capable of influencing and working upon a rational Nature. This leads me to examine more particularly the *Poſitive Inſtitutions* of the C---n Religion.

But, after all, what are thoſe poſitive Rules and Inſtitutions peculiar to the Chriſtian Revelations; the Obſervance of which hath ſuch a ſtrict Connection with our Moral or Religious Improvement; and which are neceſſary to be revealed, Mankind not being capable to know them in a natural Way? You are ſenſible, I find, that it is incumbent on you to condeſcend upon Inſtances, if you would conſiſtently defend the Rights of Revelation; and you give us, in Effect, three or four, the beſt, I ſuppoſe, you were furniſhed with. One is a Precept that Mankind are to worſhip God on the ſeventh Day.

Pref. 7 The reſt are ſeveral religious Inſtructions, depending on Circumſtances of a po-

Pref. 27. ſitive Nature. One imports, *That Mens Bodies are to be raiſed from their Graves and to ſhare with their Souls in endleſs Bliſs or Miſery.* Another is, *that the future Judgment of Mankind is to be attended with certain Circumſtances of Solemnity.*

ty. A Third, *That God will pardon Sinners upon their Repentance.*

All I ſhall ſay about the Precept commanding us to worſhip God on the ſeventh Day, I ſhall ſum up in a few Propoſitions, which, I am hopeful, will appear ſo plain, that they need no Illuſtration. It is diſcoverable by the Light of Nature,

I. THAT God is to be worſhipped.

II. THAT true Worſhip is internal, or of the Mind; which abſtracts from all Circumſtances of Time, Place, *&c.* and muſt be conſtant and uninterrupted; a perpetual Senſe of our Dependence upon God, a conſtant Deſire and Endeavour to fulfil his Will; or, as the Scripture expreſſes it, *We muſt pray always, and without ceaſing.*

III. AS to external Worſhip; the Neceſſities, Attainments, and other Circumſtances of the Worſhippers being various, no preciſe Meaſure of Time can anſwer all their Caſes, in as far as concerns true Religion. And therefore,

IV. WHATEVER particular Portion of Time may be appointed for publick Worſhip, it can only ſerve a political Purpoſe, which is different from Religion.

Laſtly. THE only Reaſon aſſigned for this Precept in the divine Inſtitution, is, That God having been employ'd ſix Days in the Works of Creation, took Reſt to himſelf on the ſeventh, and therefore appointed the ſeventh Day to be a Day of Reſt from

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all bodily Labour. From all which, I conclude, that there can be nothing in this Inſtitution, which entitles it to a divine Revelation, neceſſary for ſuch a Purpoſe as you pretend was deſign'd by it.

THE Doctrines of the Reſurrection, and Solemnity of a future Judgment, two other Inſtances, which you condeſcend upon, are ſuch, that it were a Pity you ſhould have mentioned them, if better could have been had. They indeed depend upon Circumſtances of a poſitive Nature: But if we ſet aſide ſuch Branches of theſe Doctrines, as are confeſſed to be the Dictates of Reaſon; all that remains, peculiar to Revelation, will be found to be very inconſiderable.

THAT there is a future State is commonly looked upon as a Principle of natural Religion: The Circumſtance of the Body's being raiſed, and united again to the Soul, is of no Moment, as far as I can ſee, to render a Revelation either uſeful or neceſſary; ſince there is no Happineſs or Miſery, of which a Man is capable by Means of his Body, but what he may as well enjoy or ſuffer without it.

AGAIN, that in this future State there ſhall be a juſt Retribution of Rewards and Puniſhments is commonly allowed by Chriſtian Divines to be a Principle of the ſame Nature with the former. To determine the particular Forms and Circumſtances of the Solemnity, may indeed be allowed to be the ſpecial Privilege of Revelation: But if one ſhall endeavour to eſtabliſh the Neceſſity of any ſuch Forms of Solemnity in the laſt Judgment, or rather the Belief of them, he undertakes, in my Opinion, a very ſtrange

ſtrange Task; and what particularly will give too much Countenance to Things of external Shew, which thoſe of your Communion are wont juſtly to contemn on other Occaſions. Nor do even they, who are moſt Zealous for Pomp and Ceremony, and ſtrenuouſly plead the Cauſe of Surplices, and Organs, and all the ſolemn Pageantry of a polite Cathedral Worſhip, pretend that theſe Circumſtances are neceſſary; how much ſoever they ſeem to regard them as ſuch in their Practice.

But what if theſe Forms of Solemnity in the future Judgment were really neceſſary? Will this make it neceſſary that Men know and believe that it is ſo? It is true, Mankind are very much affected with Shew and outward Appearance; but is it true that Religion is ſo built upon a Weakneſs and Vice of human Nature, as to render that Weakneſs even neceſſary. The Belief of a future Judgment may be of great Service to Religion: But does it receive any Advantage, or can it contribute to our religious Improvement, if it ſhould be revealed to us, how the whole Procedure is to be carried on; what are the Forms of Tryal, Abſolution, and Condemnation in that awful Court.

You are ſenſible, after all, that it would be for the Good and Advantage of Mankind, if theſe ſecret Relations of Things were generally known, which, in your Opinion, lay a Foundation for poſitive Rules. You are aware, that it will be objected, that it is inconſiſtent with the divine Goodneſs, in dealing with rational Creatures, that it ſhould be otherwiſe. I proceed now to conſider how you defend your Cauſe againſt this Objection.

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Pref. 9.10. *There is no Neceſſity*, you ſay, *that theſe Relations ſhould be generally known: nor can any Argument evince ſuch a Neceſſity, that would not equally prove that Mankind can be allowed to fall into no Diſtreſs whatever* But, I think, you are in the Right to ſubjoin this Caution; *why may* not God be ſuppoſed to leave Mankind in ſuch Circumſtances of Ignorance, *at leaſt for a Time*? I anſwer, *he may*, but this Caution, which you are ſenſible is neceſſary, deſtroys your very Reaſoning, which, I hope, I ſhall make out to your Satisfaction.

I OWN that rational Creatures may be ſuffered to fall into Diſtreſs *for a time*; even ſuch Diſtreſs, as they have no Means to prevent; eſpecially, if this Diſtreſs is to procure them a far greater Good afterwards. But, by adding theſe Words *for a time*, you ſeem to acknowledge, that if the Diſtreſs was ſuch, as affected their whole Concerns, and was to endure for ever, the Caſe could not be ſo well defended. All I ſhall add to this is, that to aſſert the Poſſibility of rational Creatures being ſuffered to fall into ſuch Diſtreſs, as ſhall endure for ever; and in ſuch a Way, that they could never have prevented it, is, in a very direct Manner, to deny the divine Juſtice and Goodneſs. What Morality can there be? What good and wiſe End can be gain'd by ſuffering Creatures to fall into Miſery, which they never had any Means to evite, and to continue in that State for ever? To ſuppoſe, as you do, *That the politick Ends of Government, or the Benefit ariſing from an uſeful Example, may require a Diſpenſation of this Nature, is a groundleſs Conceit: Unleſs we could imagine, that it is poſſible for*

Pref. 10. Serm. 11.

for rational Creatures to improve in Religion and Morality, by an Example which is manifeſtly immoral and irreligious. Let me know therefore the profitable Leſſons which ſuch an Example of everlaſting Miſery, as are inflicted upon ſuch as could not poſſibly avoid the ſame, can teach their Fellow Creatures.

But more of this afterwards.

Thus far you have contended, I imagine, only for the Convenience and Uſefulneſs of *Poſitive Inſtitutions*; but what you ſeem to lay the greateſt Streſs upon, and which makes Revelation abſolutely neceſſary, is, That by the Light of Nature we could never have diſcovered in what Manner God is to deal with the Guilty. This you have repeated ſeveral Times in the Preface and Sermon; and you conclude your Preface with ſaying, "That it was "for the aſſerting of thoſe Methods, in which God "will deal with the Guilty, that a divine Revelati-"on was chiefly afforded." I ſhall therefore examine this Pretence ſomewhat more particularly.

You ſeem to allow, that there are ſome natural Notions of Things, which furniſh Matter, at leaſt of probable Conjecture, "from the Con-"ſideration of the Divine Wiſdom and "Goodneſs, that God will not be rigo-"rous in puniſhing, nor Cenſure every trifling Fault; "that when he puniſhes, he will not do it to any "high Degree, nor for any Length of Time, much "leſs for ever; and that he will pardon upon "Repentance and Reformation." But, you ſay, we are to look upon this as mere Conjecture; that the Intereſt of the World in parti-

Serm. 11.

Ibid.

 cular

cular Circumſtances may require a different Management; and therefore we ſtand in need of a particular Aſſurance of what the divine Intentions are, with reſpect to our ſelves, which a Revelation only can afford us, In Anſwer to which, I ſhall endeavour to prove,

I. That what you call a Conjecture is really and in ſtrict Account a Demonſtration, if you will admit the Uſe of that Name in Morality: And that we need no other Aſſurance, nor can receive any greater than what Reaſon affords us.

II. That the Perſwaſion of thePardon of Sin upon Repentance, which is attainable by the Uſe of Reaſon, is equally certain with that of the divine Goodneſs; that if the one be conjectural, ſo is the other.

III. And conſequently, that the Belief of any Revelation cannot poſſibly contain a greater Degree of Certainty.

IV. That allowing this Perſuaſion to be founded on Conjecture, it cannot juſtly ſubject our Minds to any troublefome Anxiety or Solitude, from which we can be freed by Revelation.

Firſt, It flows naturally from the Belief of the Goodneſs and Wiſdom of God, that ſuch as repent ſhall be pardoned; that he will not puniſh us for ſuch Errors, as we have truly recollected, and from which we are recovered; and that what Puniſhments are inflicted, are in order to reclaim us. Theſe Principles I take to be ſo juſt, ſo ſuitable to all the rational Notions, which we can form to ourſelves of an in-

infinitely perfect Being, that they would meet with no Oppoſition among Mankind, the thinking Part of Mankind, I mean; if they did not, (I had almoſt ſaid wilfully) ſtumble upon ſome ill-grounded Scruples; and neglect the free, open and ſincere Exerciſe of their Faculties; either thro' Prejudice, Lazineſs, or abject ſlaviſh Fear, in ſeeking after Truth.

For what End, muſt we ſuppoſe that God puniſhes his Creatures? Is it not for their Good? Or is it poſſible that Puniſhments can ſerve for any other valuable Purpoſe? Now this Good muſt mean, either the Good of the Party puniſhed, or of others, who may be ſuppoſed to profit by the Example. The Party or Perſon ſuffering is, in my Opinion, utterly incapable of receiving any other Benefit from the Puniſhment, than that of being reclaim'd from his Errors, and fortify'd againſt them in Time coming: And this, when the Affliction becomes the Occaſion of his ſerious Recollection and Repentance.

It ſeems likewiſe abundantly evident, That there is no Way, by which the Puniſhment of any Perſon can be ſerviceable or uſeful to others, but in ſo far as theſe Perſons can perceive the Puniſhment to have been inflicted with a moral View; that is to ſay, for the Good of the Sufferer. And therefore, the Inſinuation of what may be thought fit to be done by the Governour of the World, for attaining ſome good Ends of his Government, makes no Alteration, that can affect our preſent Argument. But this perhaps needs to be further illuſtrated.

If any Perſon is ſuppoſed to be puniſhed in ſuch a Way, as may be for his Good; and is actually

reſtored to Favour, as ſoon as that good End is obtained; it is eaſy to ſee the many uſeful Leſſons, which may be learned in every Circumſtance of this moral Example. But if, on the other Hand, he is tortured and afflicted, with no ſuch kind Intention; and only to let others ſee how a remedileſs and endleſs Miſery ariſes from the ſlighteſt Tranſgreſſion, which he never could avoid; and which, now that he is fallen into it, leaves no Room for Repentance, nor Hopes of Amendment. *What can this Example teach me? Can it make me careful not to offend? Can it encourage me to repent? How evident is the contrary?* For, if I believe, that a Perſon is capable to fall into ſuch a diſmal State of Suffering, inevitably, and without all Hope of Remedy; I ſee no other Concluſion I can draw from ſuch an Example, but an utter Deſpair, which renders all Caution vain and uſeleſs; and takes from me all Thoughts of Reformation.

The Circumſtances of human Nature are ſuch, that in many Caſes we inavoidably tranſgreſs the ſtrict and perfect Rules of Action, as we are Creatures of ſuch limited Capacities, and unequal Temper: But eſpecially, if the Rules of Action are undiſcoverable by us, without the Help of *poſitive Revelation*, with which a great Part of Mankind is not privileged. I am ſure, if God is a good Being, there muſt be ſome poſſible Remedy for thoſe Evils, which may befal Man, in this Circumſtance of his Nature; not only in order to prevent what he himſelf might otherwiſe undergo, but likewiſe the Anxiety and Deſpair of others; and all the fatal Effects, which would follow, if, as ſoon as he had ſinned, he had entailed upon himſelf a dreadful Neceſſity of growing

growing worſe, and becoming more and more miſerable: Thus indeed he would be ſet forth to others a terrible Example; an Example which could only throw them into an abſolute Deſpair; and ſuch as muſt extinguiſh all Purpoſe of Goodneſs.

You ſeem to think, *That the only Effect of our not knowing, in a natural Way, the preciſe Manner, in which God intends to deal with the Guilty, would be an endleſs Anxiety.* But this *Pref.* 24. you have not fairly repreſented, even allowing your own Principles. For altho' one had no expreſs Declaration of the Divine Will with regard to Sinners; yet if there is Ground to hope the beſt, and ſuch probable Ground of Hope, as may render a Man more earneſt and ſolicitous to recommend himſelf to the Favour of God, by ſincere Repentance and Amendment; he is not to be eſteem'd the more miſerable for this Anxiety. And I humbly conceive, that it is no Diſadvantage to the Principles of *Deiſts*, if ſuch a Solicitude is ſuppoſed ro take Place, only by Virtue of their Syſtem.

But, I preſume, your real Sentiments are the ſame with thoſe of your Brethren in this Matter, *That without the Aſſurance of Revelation, we muſt utterly deſpair of Pardon; that we have no* data, *upon which we can proceed in judging of the Divine Conduct towards us, as Sinners:* From which it muſt follow, that as we can entertain no Hopes of Forgiveneſs, we can have no Encouragement to repent; but are given over to irrevockable Perdition. And here allow me again to ask you, *What Benefit can ariſe to our Fellow-Creatures from ſuch a Method of proceeding with the Guilty?* Or rather, *Would it*

not

not be vaſtly prejudicial and hurtful to them? Can it then be ſuppoſed conſiſtent with the Divine Goodneſs, to puniſh his Creatures in ſuch a Manner, as neither the Sufferers, nor any others can receive the leaſt Advantage, or good Inſtruction from the Puniſhment? Horrid, irreligious Notion of Infinite Perfection!

In fine, I think, I have Reaſon to conclude, That the Belief, or Perſwaſion of Pardon upon Repentance attainable, by the Uſe of Reaſon, is as certain and demonſtrable, as that God is juſt and good: And conſequently, that the Objection you have raiſed againſt that Ground of Hope, upon which Sinners may promiſe themſelves Remiſſion, is of no Weight.

What I have already advanced, I take to be the moſt direct Anſwer to your Pretence of the Neceſſity of Revelation, from the Circumſtance of the Guilt of Mankind: But as this is a Point, which deſerves to be more fully illuſtrated, I ſhall lay together ſeveral other Thoughts upon the ſame Subject, as a farther Anſwer to your Argument, as they may fall under the ſeveral Heads, which I undertook to prove.

I had ſaid before that we cannot be more certain that God is good, than that he will be reconciled to his Creatures, upon their Repentance; that there is as much Conjecture in the one, as in the other. For, not to inſiſt on that kind of Proof of the divine Goodneſs, by which his moral Perfections are ſuppoſed a neceſſary Conſequence of theſe called natural (a Proof not univerſally admitted) the common Method of proving this uſeful Principle, and that which is thought beſt adapted to the Capacities of all Men, is drawn from the ſuppoſed manifeſt

ſeſt Effects of Goodneſs, which appear through all the Works of God. Now whatever Degree of Goodneſs we may diſcover in any particular Inſtance; and how highly probable ſoever it may be, that the Supreme Being intends nothing but what is good; yet in ſome Senſe, this is only a Conjecture: Becauſe it is at leaſt poſſible, for all that we know, that in the Main, or Sum of Things, Evil may prevail; and the divine Purpoſes and Intentions may be quite different from what we commonly imagine. And as the Caſe ſtands thus with reſpect to infinite Goodneſs (no Proof of this Nature excluding all Poſſibility of its being otherwiſe) ſo it is the ſame with regard to any uſeful Concluſions, we can be ſuppoſed to draw from this Principle.

From the Belief or Perſuaſion of the divine Goodneſs, we can lay down ſome uſeful Rules for our own Conduct, and draw Concluſions for enſuring the Peace and Comfort of our Minds: All our Reaſonings on this Principle can extend no farther. But when we proceed upon this general Notion to determine what God will, or ought to do; it may be ſuggeſted that we proceed at Random upon Gueſſes and Conjecture. That God is wiſe and good we know in general; but we cannot tell what Wiſdom and Goodneſs will require him to do in ſuch a particular Caſe; becauſe he acts as Governor of the World, and muſt proceed with an equal Regard to all its Concerns which are unknown to us. And as, for this Reaſon, we cannot certainly diſcover what God will do in any particular Circumſtance, ſo neither can we know, for the ſame Reaſon, what he inclines we ſhould do in any particular Situation; for

tho'

tho' he is a Being, Wiſe and Good, yet we know not the whole Series of his Affairs.

But ſuch a way of Reaſoning renders the Notion we have of divine Goodneſs an uſeleſs Speculation; ſuch as can, in no Caſe, be improved for the Comfort of our Minds, or the Direction of our Lives. And if it is no more but Conjecture, that God will pardon the Penitent; all is no leſs Conjecture, that we can know or diſcover of his Goodneſs, all that we can infer from this moſt uſeful Principle, the neceſſary Foundation of all Religion, both natural and revealed: For the Belief of any Revelation muſt preſuppoſe the Belief of the Goodneſs of God.

3. Let a Man have all the Aſſurances he could wiſh or deſire, that ſuch a Doctrine is come from God; how can he be certain that it is his Will and Pleaſure, that he ſhould receive this Doctrine upon the Credit of all thoſe Probabilities, that ſpeak in its Behalf; for they can riſe no higher than Probabilities. As I know not, may he ſay, all the Deſigns of God; for any Thing I know, God intends only to make a Trial of me by this ſpecious Evidence; and, if I ſhould admit it, or be influenced by it, 'tis more than he deſigned; or, at leaſt, that I may become an Example to others, or ſerve ſome End, quite different from what appears to me, or ſeems to be intended. And even, if I were convinced, that it is reaſonable for me to receive this Doctrine upon the Evidence ſuppoſed, this Concluſion is ſtill conjectural; and it is poſſible that I ought to have done otherwiſe.

But,

But, perhaps, you will ſay, That the expreſs Teſtimony and Aſſurance of Revelation is of another Kind than thoſe Inferences and Concluſions, which, by the Uſe and Exerciſe of Reaſon, we draw from the Suppoſition of the Goodneſs of God for our Acceptance with him upon Repentance: Theſe are not ſo firmly to be rely'd upon, as the ſure, explicite Declaration of God himſelf revealing his Will to us, which amounts to a complete Demonſtration, and excludes the leaſt Degree of Doubt, and in which we may ſafely and infallibly confide. But if you advert to what I have already advanced, you will find that, let the Evidence of the Truth of a Revelation be as ſtrong as you your ſelf can imagine, it is ſo far from being infallible, that it muſt neceſſarily be liable to the ſame Imputation of Conjecture and Uncertainty, as the other Principle, which I maintain; which if you reject, you can ſubſtitute nothing in its Place of more certain Evidence. This makes Way for another Reflection.

4. I ſhall ſuppoſe, for Argument's Sake, that it is not abſolutely certain from the Suppoſition of his Goodneſs, that God will pardon the Penitent, yet this Principle will not ceaſe however to give Quiet and Peace to our Minds, and free them from any troubleſome Anxiety and Solicitude.

It is, at leaſt, owned to be the moſt natural Order of Things, and that which is the moſt probable Caſe, that a Being of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs will pardon the Penitent. If this is by far the moſt likely Caſe, the moſt juſt and perfect Rule, which I can conceive, for the divine Management

with reſpect to the Guilty, it ſhould give me no Diſturbance to imagine, *That poſſibly, or for Reaſons, which are not in my Power to diſcover, it may be otherwiſe in ſome ſingular Circumſtances.* A mere Poſibility does not affect me; becauſe I muſt act rationally, and proceed upon ſuch Evidence, as is to be had; And, " where I cannot
Perf. 16, 17. " have a Demonſtration, go upon " ſuch Evidence, as Mankind com-
" monly reckon ſufficient for their moſt important " Affairs; and, in the preſent Caſe, ought to ſatisfy " myſelf with an Evidence of this Kind; and ven-
" ture my greateſt Concerns upon ſuch a Bottom. I " cannot ſee that we can refuſe to do this, but " upon ſuch Principles, as will diſcard all Evidence " but downright Demonſtration."

Now if this is owned to be rational and prudent Management, it can leave no Room for any uneaſy Doubts. For a wiſe Man reſts ſatisfy'd, when he knows he has done his beſt, and obtained ſuch a probable Aſſurance in any Affair, as Men commonly do, and muſt needs depend upon. Would it not be abſurd, if he ſhould wait for miraculous Teſtimony, after all the Satisfaction and Aſſurance, which could reaſonably be expected, in a Way agreeable to the preſent Circumſtance and Condition of his Nature? I add further, That

The ſame Doubts, the ſame Anxiety and Uneaſineſs of Mind have Place in the moſt expreſs Aſſurances, that Revelation can be ſuppoſed to afford, as well as in a natural State, where Reaſon is the only Guide.

ARE not any Declarations, which can be made in Revelation, of a general Nature; that is to ſay, ſuch as aſſure us in general, that God will pardon thoſe who repent? But before this can furniſh a Sinner with any Ground of Comfort, he muſt know Something more; *viz.* what is to be accounted a ſufficient Meaſure of Repentance, a true and effectual Amendment. Unleſs a Revelation is perſonal, and particular with reſpect to every Man, I do not ſee how it can afford us this Knowledge: For it can only deſcribe Repentance and Amendment in general Characters, and ſuch as muſt be underſtood with conſiderable Alterations, according to the State of the Penitent. To illuſtrate this, let it be conſidered, That

IT is owned, on the one Hand, That a Man's being ſenſible of his Error, and reſolved upon Amendement, is not always a true Repentance; for we find that ſuch Convictions, and Reſolutions, do not always produce a ſuitable Change in the Behaviour: On the other Hand, it is confeſſed, both upon Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, that true Repentance does not ſuppoſe ſuch a Reformation, as excludes all Relapſes; and conſequently a perfect Amendment is not to be reckoned the Teſt of true Repentance.

There are certain Faults and Errors, which, in the Account of all Religions, are to be looked upon, as the unavoidable Frailty of human Nature. But where is that Standard, or Meaſure, by which we can judge what theſe Errors are? How ſhall we determine what

what is a pardonable Frailty, and not to come into Account in judging of true Repentance?

It is impoſſible to characterize theſe, except in a general Way, and in ſuch a Manner, as we muſt have Recourſe to theſe natural Notions of Things, by which we may know what is to be accounted Good, in the Main, and a reaſonable Attainment for ſuch Creatures as we are. I ſhould be glad to know, how a Man can reſolve ſuch Scruples, otherwiſe than by a Knowledge, which is conjectural, and proceeds upon Principles of Reaſon, and which includes the ſame Anxiety and Solicitude, as if there were no Revelation in the Caſe.

There are indeed Divines, eſpecially of your Communion, who maintain, "That beſides the general Revelation of the Will of God, there are particular "perſonal Aſſurances obtained, by an inward Teſtimony of the Spirit of God; and which they "think abſolutely neceſſary to ſerve this Purpoſe "of freeing the Minds of Sinners from Anxiety and "Solicitude; and without which, they contend, "there is no poſſible Foundation of Peace to the "guilty Mind." This I own would indeed be Something more than Conjecture: But they are ſo few, who put the Affair upon this Iſſue, (nor do I ſuſpect that you are one of them) that I ſhall not be ſo unfair, as to ſuppoſe that main Argument for the Neceſſity of the Chriſtian Revelation depends upon a Sort of Experience, which has never been claimed by any conſiderable Party of Chriſtians.

And yet I cannot but think, That without this Suppoſition of a particular, and perſonal Revelation, there

there is no Manner of Advantage of which Chriſtians can boaſt, but others may enjoy, by the due Uſe of their natural Faculties. For Reaſon teaches, and that in a demonſtrative Way, That if we do truly repent, and amend, we ſhall be acceptable to God; and Revelation can give us no farther Aſſurance that I can ſee, unleſs it were perſonal, or that inward Teſtimony of the Spirit, which is infallible; and like that which the Logicians call *intuitive Knowledge*, acquired without the laborious, and uncertain Method of exerciſing our Faculties, and by a Train of Arguments drawn from allowed Principles, tracing out the Truth, and relying upon Concluſions, which, Reaſon only aſſures us, directly and naturally flow from ſuch Principles. It is certainly an eaſy, delightful Way of finding the Truth, and admirably well calculated for a great Part of Mankind, who want either Opportunities, Abilities or Inclination to enquire into theſe valuable Matters. I am,

SIR,

Your humble Servant, &c.

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